

est-ce pour cela que j'aime mieux éviter  
qu'il me le  
demande. J'espère de tout mon cœur qu'il  
n'est pas  
mourant, comme il le dit, mais vraiment si  
cela devait  
arriver, ce ne serait pas le moment pour  
moi de faire la  
connaissance de ces deux créatures qui  
m'ont privée du  
plus agréable de mes amis pendant quinze  
ans, et qu'il me  
laisserait pour compte une fois que je ne  
pourrais mSme  
pas en profiter pour le voir, lui, puisqu'il  
serait mort!'

Proust's aristocrats are stupid (except the  
Duchesse with  
her barbed tongue), frivolous, futile, brutal,  
and vulgar;  
and yet, even to the end, this fallen race  
keeps a glamour  
for him. Was Proust a snob? It is a rather  
idle question,  
long and idly debated. Certainly, I think, he  
was at one  
period. It would be hard indeed to acquit of  
snobbery the  
Proust who describes with such unction, in  
his early series  
of articles on the *salons* of Paris society, how  
he saw some  
unfortunate person told at the door of the  
Countess  
Potocka that she was not at home, despite  
the carriage  
of the Duchesse de Luynes only too  
obviously waiting  
?at the gate; and adds how he considerably  
waited till the  
despised and rejected one had turned the  
corner, before  
himself triumphantly claiming and obtaining  
entry. His  
aesthetic sensitiveness was charmed by the  
grace of good  
manners—he contrasts, almost passionately,  
'cette peur de  
paraître trop empressée ... qui enlaidit de  
tant de laideur  
et de gaucherie la plus sincère amabilité

plebeienne'  
(which is surely but too true). Even his  
schoolfellows  
had mocked his own over-elaborateness, for  
which they  
maliciously coined the admirable word  
'proustifier\*. And  
again his imagination was thrilled by the  
pure poetry of  
ancestry. 'Je revoyais les armoiries qui sont  
peintes aux  
soubassements des vitraux de Combray, et  
dont les quar-  
tiers etaient remplis, siecle par siecle, de  
toutes les sei-  
gneuries que, par manages ou acquisitions,  
cette illustre